

Field study has many unique aspects to it. It is the one perfect vehicle for the Anthropologist to get some insight into the workings of another culture. It is a very difficult task to throw off the values of your own culture and make yourself free enough to be able to understand and see the value of the cultural traits of a people, which may be different from, or in opposition to your own cultural views. It takes a great deal of training to be able to do this, and also a large amount of time in the field. As a student, and having only five weeks available to me in Aruba, I found it necessary to use some of the knowledge that I have from my culture as a basis for comparison with the information of the same type that I have found on Aruba.

P My topic of study is -What role does Catholicism play in Aruban life. By the term "role" I mean, what function, what purpose, what good or evil, what influence both spiritual and temporal is exerted. By the term, Catholicism, I mean not only the universal regular rituals that are performed by priests in the church, (but also) [more importantly, I mean] the peoples' dependence on the Church for both spiritual and temporal aid, the actual personal role of being a Catholic in Aruba. By the expression 'Aruban Life', I mean the total concept of life. Why are they Catholics? Does it influence their lives? Why pick one religion over another? Is it important which religion you belong to? Does one religion

the subjective experience?

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help you more than another religion when you need assistance? What does religion do for you? How does it help you? These are some of the questions that I asked in my field interviews. The answers were remarkably similar and very pro-Catholic. The reasons for this may vary. The people might have been "aiming to please" in answering my questions the way they felt I wanted them answered, or (and this could be important to me,) they answered with great praise of the Catholic Church because the church somehow controlled the lives of the individuals in the congregation. This was a question that needed answering. My original problem- What role does Catholicism play in Aruba? encompasses this question. From my findings in fieldwork and from the literature that I have read and with the comparison of my own knowledge of Catholicism in the States, I will try to prove that the role of Catholicism is an integral and traditional one in Aruba both in the past and in the present.

(showing might be better here)
My method in proving the integral role of Catholicism in Aruba in the past and in the present, was a series of interviews with a cross section of the population of Aruba. I had interviews with three priests of Dutch origin. I met with the elusive "real Aruban" natives in Santa Cruz. I spoke to women in San Nicolas who had come many years ago from other islands and who were very black. I also spoke with several more recent

immigrants to the island. All of these people were of different cultural backgrounds. There wasn't much interaction between each of these divided and separate groups, yet they all have one common bond on Aruba, the Catholic Church. The unifying ability of the church seems to be quite phenomenal even at the present time.

The role of the church was slightly different in the past than it is now in the present. Historically the Catholic Church came early to Aruba. It's members came mostly from the lower classes. At first the Indians were baptized into the faith by visiting missionaries. These converts were then left to make their own religious life, because the missionaries only came to the island from time to time. Usually a leader of the people arose and became a secular priest. He conducted prayer meetings, advised people and made sure that the people remembered holy days and other such occasions. This man was usually a leader in the community. His position in the community was further strengthened by the fact that he was associated with the church. Life for the natives at this time was rather dull. Religion fulfilled a purpose. It was an interesting diversion and made life more lively and satisfied the needs of the people. Naturally the people would tend to be more pulled toward the church when it fulfilled such a need for them. The church

Can you specify needs other than diversion?
The social dislocations and changes of
acculturation may indeed have created a place
for the Church - it would be good to find this out
if possible.

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became more and more powerful as time went on and as priests and more elaborate churches and ceremonies were brought to the island. The church took on new roles.

The ^eformost of these roles was that of a unifying agent and central core around which the other institutions on the island were built. The church with its organization became a very stable^{part} of the Indians less stable lives.

Since the church, with its impressive buildings, (may have been) clothing and rituals seemed so unmovable there was a

natural tendency for the people to turn toward it for advice in family or other problems. The church was in all parts of the daily life. Since the church was so

closely associated with the lives of the people in the parish, it came to be not only the source of counseling and advice, but also the regulator of the group, the

"police force", the rule enforcer. Since the government at this time did not interact with the Indians, the

church became a liason between the government and the people. The church in fact became a form of local

government, and in the parish the priest was the most influential man. Thus by being the unifying agent and

central core of the parish and the society in general,

the church gave rise to other institutions. It gave rise to local political governments, to a more interested

all island government, to police departments, to

counseling and welfare agencies and to large scale

Documentation?
This seems like
a very
interesting &
important
point.

how?

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educational systems.

The church gradually was relieved of many of the responsibilities which it traditionally had. The church no longer holds as strategic a role as it did in the past. This is not to say that the church has lost its influence. The influence of the church has remained strong, but it has been tempered by the development and modernization of the Aruban people. The Arubans are now by and large not completely oblivious to the changing times around them. Even on my visits to the Cunucu in the outskirts of the parish of Santa Cruz, in the barrios of Jan Flemming, and Sabana Grande, the people were aware of the new problems on the island. They were aware of some of the government activity and ^{what?} they were aware that the position of the church has changed. They still felt a great fervor of religion and walked very far so that they could go to church, and yet they said sadly, that the church didn't have the power and influence that it had before. One informant [I had] a woman of about 60, from the Jamanota barrio, blamed this loss of influence on the coming of Lago to Aruba. She said that the men became more independent when they had work and that this drew them away from the home and away from the church. By the way it seemed to be the general consensus of all of the people that I interviewed, that men on Aruba had less use for religion

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than the women did. This was all fine when Lago was in full operation, but after the big layoffs, the men returned home, were unhappy and didn't turn to the church for help. This is not to say that the church has no influence on these people any longer. The church still is an integral part of the community, but the traditional roles and functions performed by the church have been tempered by time and the improved sophistication of the people. The church still is an advisor. It fulfills the spiritual needs of the people. The priest still is the man who is trusted and who can be talked to about personal matters. The only difference is that now the priest is not the only one to work in these capacities. The role of adviser is now also filled by the government, with its welfare department and field welfare workers. The church as a form of government still exists in a mild form. The church no longer exerts an "iron hand" so to speak, over its people. The church does play a role in the shaping of the lives of the people in one major capacity-Education. It is true that all schools on the island are government endowed, but based on statistics that I got from Father Berlaghe, the pastor of the church at Santa Cruz, only about 50 of the people in the parish of Santa Cruz which has about 10,000 people, send their children to the government schools instead of to the church schools. He said that

that these people did it just to be difficult. People in general, according to Father Berlaghe, feel that their children get a better education in the Catholic schools. The priest himself admitted that the education that the children got in the parish schools is very similar and almost equal in material to that which is taught in the public schools. Thus in performing the same basic roles, the church at present still fulfills the most central role, that of a unifying agent in the society. Granted that the function of the church on Aruba has been tempered by time, but it is still an integral part of the society.

The people of Aruba have become more state minded and more world minded. This has helped to reinforce the integral but changed role of the church. With the advent of increased technology the people on Aruba have caught up, so to speak, with the rest of the world. This leads to the basis of my comparison with Catholicism as I know it in the United States. I have been educated in the parochial school system in New York City and I have attended both church services and been a member of church organizations. From these experiences I think I have at least a fairly good idea of the control of the church and the communities' reaction to it in the United States.

By comparison the "sphere of influence" of the

seems like
cutting off
your nose
to spite
your face
Are there
any reasons
people might
feel public
education
was
better?

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church in Aruba is far more powerful and obvious than the influence that is exerted by the church in the States. Separation of church and state was and still is a basic ideal that our country was founded on. Our founding fathers made great provisions for this dicotomy to exist. Co-operation of church and state is the rule for government in Aruba. Separation is not necessary for several good reasons. The island is small, the population is small and most importantly, the island was founded on a fairly stable religious foundation. There were no great religious struggles. The Catholic religion came to Aruba, sprang up and flourished with little hampering by the government. Since a working relationship was reached right away, it was only natural that the two most powerful influences on the island, the church and the government should continue to co-operate and be friendly.

Aruba generally considers itself as a Catholic country. The United States is proud of the many different kinds of people and the many different religions of its people. This and the other reasons that I have stated in the previous paragraphs are the reasons why the church in Aruba fulfills a different role for the people, than the Catholic church fulfills for the people of the United States. Differences in national character, differences in relative technical development, differences

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in government , differences in ideals, and differences in need all serve to make the different functions in the same church appear in both locales. It must not be said that one church is more efficient than the other, it must be said the churches have adapted their functions according to the society which developed around it, and though the strength or influence of the church may be strikingly different it fulfills adequately the needs of the people of that particular society at that time. The church is a stable organization, but it does have the capacity to change and adapt to different people and different situations, and for this reason it has remained a notable influence on peoples lives for so many years.

To substantiate the premise that the role of Catholicism in Aruba is an integral one, I used readings, observations, and comparisons with the States and also I interviewed many people about their attitudes towards their religion. I can generalize and say that all of the people, from the varied economic groups on the island, all had a strong feeling for the church. I interviewed light people, dark people, rich people, poor people, native Arubans, and immigrants both old and new. In what follows next I would like to attempt to give the descriptions of my informants and also some of their answers to the questions that I stated in the beginning of this paper, namely, Why are you a Catholic? What influence does this

have on your life? How does your religion help you when you need it? I tried to observe how these questions were answered, and with what gestures and intonations they were answered with. Classification of people into set little piles is certainly not a good thing to do even if it could be done. In my very loose system of classification I am only using four criteria, color, education, ethnic background and economics.

The first thing I decided to do was to speak to several of the pastors on the island. I hoped that in doing this it would be helpful in two ways: 1) It would be easier to start interviewing when you were speaking to someone who was more educated and who spoke English fluently, 2) If the priest really was a powerful figure in the church he would be a good contact with the people of the parish. The first two Dutch priests that I spoke to were quite old and were in semi-retirement and therefore did not ~~still~~ ^{any more} have too much contact with their parishioners. One of them was from the parish of Saint Ann on the North coast, and the other was from the orphanage at Imaldehyof, just North of Oranjestad. Since they were both old men of over 70, they spoke with some authority about the progress of Catholicism on Aruba. Independently they both said much the same thing. Before Lago the island was very poor, but the people were not unhappy. The church was very powerful. Now after the influence of Lago, the people in general are still poor,

how has Lago influenced, according to these men?

not as poor as before though, and the church has lost some of its power. Both priests did not seem to feel badly about the changed role of the church. They seemed to think that the lessening of the role of the church was a matter of evolution and that naturally as a group of people get more sophisticated their psychological need for the church will lessen and the church will come to play a less important physical part in their lives.

The pastor of Saint Teresa's church in San Nicolas, Father Van Veen, was a younger man of about 35. The parishioners in San Nicolas are mostly black and are generally poorer than other Arubans. They are fairly recent immigrants from the other islands in the Caribbean. These people have no real love or devotion to Aruba. I spoke to a Mrs. Chittuck, an immigrant from Santo Domingo. She had been in Aruba for 32 years. Father Van Veen had introduced me to her because she was the president of the Legion of Mary in his parish. Even after 32 years on the island, she still did not associate herself closely with it.

She referred to the Arubans as foreign people to her and even went so far to say that they were decent people and made good neighbors. Mrs. Chittuck took me with her on a few visits to the homes of some people in San Nicolas. Even though she went to these homes to give spiritual help through the Legion of Mary, she kept herself aloof from them. She didn't talk to the lighter people she visited

as equals. There was some kind of tension between them. She kept herself in the role of an outsider. There were two different Legions of Mary in the Church of Saint Teresa. One Legion was composed only of English speaking people. The other Legion was of Papiamentu speaking people. I spoke, with Mrs. Chittuck as interpreter, to Mrs. Cheung, the president of the Papiamentu speaking group. She too was a rather old immigrant to Aruba, but she had a little more warmth towards the people of Aruba. The other people in the group when asked where they were from, answered Aruba. Mrs. Cheung's identification with such a group would tend to pull her more into the group than out of it. In introducing me to these two women, Father Van Veen did me a favor, but I must say that of all of the Dutch people that I spoke to, he was the most condescending. I was not able to get much from my interview with him because of his condescending attitude toward me. It seems strange to me that an island with so many good Catholic people should have a priest that seems to not really be interested in the people and who even seems to look down on them. I do not know how a parishioner who went to him for help would feel. Certainly, to have your priest, a respected member of society, look down on you would not be good for the mental well being of the person. The church is there as a crutch, for temporal aid as well as for spiritual aid. If spiritual aid is supposed to calm

who was superior?
how could you tell?

Chinese?

which group? the Pap? of m?

how could you tell this? who did he say? specific?

Is there anything people could get from this? 13
(i.e. a consistent view of their place in the
society, similar to views of other Dutchmen or
priests?)

and reassure the individual, then a priest with a
condescending attitude would do much damage in his parish.

I have a particular fondness for the parish of Santa
Cruz because of the two wonderful priests who I met there.
Father Jahnsen was a young man of about 30. It was
unfortunate that I only was able to speak with him twice.
He was just about to be transferred to be the pastor in Bonnaire.
Even though he was very busy getting ready to go, he was
more than willing to answer all of my questions and to
help me as much as possible. He took me with him one day
while he was saying good-bye to his parishioners. He
stressed the importance of a priest to become involved
in his parishioners. He said that the best way to
increase the role of the church to that of the central core
of importance in the parish, is to have the priest leave
the rectory, go out into the Cunucu and talk to the
people. He had only been in the parish of Santa Cruz for
six months and he said that in that time, because he had
gone to them, there had been a remarkable change in the
people's attitudes toward religion. More people out in
the Cunucu make more of an effort to get to church.
There was more Community spirit, He had the men build a
cross of Santa Cruz. He showed it to me and said that on
it were rocks that were from all over the island, and that
some of the rocks were peculiar to Aruba. He said that
the building of the cross and the symbolism of unity that

it had for the people was very important to the strengthening of the ties of the people to the church. The people that Father Jahanson took me to see were of very different backgrounds. They all had two things in common. They were all Catholics and they were all what they consider to be native Arubans, defined as people of Indian background who have lived here for many generations. Nina Vrolick was a school teacher who taught third grade in the church school. She was also the organist at the church. She understood English well, but spoke it with difficulty. I spoke to Nina at least six times and she became my favorite informant. She had a sense of humor and was very kind and wanted to help. She invited me to a wedding in Santa Cruz. This was a good opportunity for me to see the people in a religious setting that was just a little out of the ordinary. The church was completely full and it was a rather elaborate wedding. The ceremony itself was very similar to wedding masses in the States. It was at the reception that I was able to speak with some of the people. It was a definitely upper crust wedding. The people themselves considered it to be so and it was an honor to be invited to the reception. There were Dutch people there as well as Arubans. The bride was a teacher. I spoke to one Dutch couple, both of whom were teachers at the church school. They had been in Aruba for four years and still did not speak

her background?

how could you tell?
(dress, social factors other than Dutch?)

Papiamentu. Aruban's in their company spoke only Dutch. The wedding like most weddings in the States seemed to be more of a social significance than of a religious significance. The priests and nuns all came to the reception but they seemed to sit by themselves. The people did not go out of their way to socialize with them. This could have been for several reasons; 1) there was some kind of restriction against it 2) the people were embarrassed to be there and were not used to meeting the clergy socially 3) there was drinking and the people might have felt restricted to be drinking with a priest, since drinking is considered to be a major problem among the men. The people were very friendly to me. I found that most people in the Santa Cruz area were more friendly than some of the people in the other areas of Aruba.

Some of the other families that Father Jahnsen took me to see were a little less well off than Nina Vrolick. The family of Paulus Geerman was fairly well off. The father was a welder at Lago. They had an immaculately clean house with about 12 children in it. They were very proud of all of their possessions. They showed me all of what they considered to be their prize possessions. They were very happy to see the priest. They stopped whatever they were doing to see if they could be of any assistance to him. Father Jahnsen said that this was the head family in the barrio and that they prided

Good observations.
Good.
How would you go about finding out which of these was so?

Why do you think?

What were they?

16
how could you tell?
themselves on their home and on their respectability.

Religion was important to them. Another group of families I visited with Fathe Jahnsen were much poorer. They had no cars and were isolated way out in the Cunucu. One family, the Castor family, no longer had a father because he was killed six years ago at an accident at Lago. These people did not speak English and Father Jahnsen interpreted for me. There seemed to be no bitterness toward Lago, Father Jahnsen said they were not bitter because they believed in god. They were very poor but there were at least two married sons who were living at home and helping to support the family. The children in this and in the other homes were all very beautiful. They are shy when the priest comes and run and hide to change into their best clothes. They may be shy with the priest, but it seems that they are closer to their priests than are the children in the States. The family of Theodore Coorman was poor also. He had about 8 children and he also worked at Lago. He was a less skilled worker than Coerman so his job was not as high paying and consequently his house was a little smaller and plainer and he had fewer possessions. They were happy to see the priest, but were more reserved. Father Janson said that these are the people that the priest has a responsibility to reach and keep in close contact with the church, otherwise these are the people who soon lose their religion. The

why?

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last family that Father Jahnson took me to meet were the poorest. They were fishermen and lived far away from the church. Their house had electricity and water but that was about all. There was practically no furniture and nothing on the dirt floor. The small children ran around naked. You could sense the embarrassment or even a little resentment that the priest had come. These people never go to church because they are too far away from it and have no means of transportation to it. Father Jahnson brought the church to them by celebration masses in private homes in the Cunucu.

While in Santa Cruz I met a few other interesting people Felipe Chemaly was a businessman who sold groceries to small grocery stores on the island. He had a friend with him whose name was Adolpho Pinedo. Felipe was a recent immigrant from Haiti. He was about 40 years old. Adolpho was a recent immigrant from Colombia and he was about 65. They spoke in Spanish to each other because they felt that they were completely different from the Arubans. Both of them are what I would call "religious fanatics". When they heard that I was studying religion they went out of their way to help me. They took me to see the priest in Savanetta and at Imaldehyof. They had religious pictures scattered all over their car. Religion was the core of their lives and they went to mass at least once a day. They had great respect for the

Dutch primarily because they thought they were religious people and had helped the church in Aruba. They looked with disdain on the Arubans themselves because they did not think that they were involved in their religion enough. It was strange that when I asked them about miracles or sacraments they were only able to give me sketchy answers. More concrete questions like, why do you believe, they answered with shrugs and answers like "we know it's the truth". If I asked them why they knew it was the truth, they answered that the church said that it was and that it must be the truth. It did not seem to matter to them that they did not have real concrete reasons for believing. They just believed.

The other priest that I talked to in Santa Cruz was Father Berlaghe. He became the pastor of Santa Cruz when Father Jahnsen left. He was an older man of about 65. He was also acquainted with his parishioners since he had been in the parish for 6 years. There was one difference between him and Father Jahnsen. Father Berlaghe was also interested in his people and he did go to visit them, but he was a much (softer) priest than Father Jahnsen. Rather than make the people a little more self reliant, he helped them too quickly by giving them money. Father Jahnsen thought that this was not the right approach. He thought it was very necessary for the people to have self respect and a certain amount of self reliance.

according to
Jahnsen?

There were many other people that I interviewed. I found out large amounts of very interesting data, but most of it had nothing to do with religion. This made it less valuable for my paper, but not less valuable to me. This summer was a very rewarding experience for me. I enjoyed talking to people and making friends with new people, while trying to find information about my topic. There are a great many difficulties in field work, most of them are difficulties within yourself. This summer has taught me at least one thing, that is you cannot look at another culture and expect it to conform with what you are use to. You have to adapt yourself to them. ✓

Through my interviews and observations, I will conclude by saying that the Catholic Church is of very vital and integral importance to the people of Aruba. It fulfills the psychological need for security as well as the spiritual need that the people feel to have a god, and it also fulfills the temporal need of being a money source and help in time of need. All of these roles of the church have been tempered by time, but the church still has enough importance in the community to make these roles important to the people. The role of the Church in Aruba is evolving, as it evolves in all countries that are rising out of backwardness. I am sure that there will be further changes in the church. The reason that the concept of the church has lasted so long and even the very

how? and data on who has helped, who & how much?

what would you predict?

reason why any ancient religion has lasted so long, is that there has to be room for change. Religion has to try to remain as stable as it possibly can, so that it can better serve the people by giving them a sense of security and solidarity, but it cannot stagnate and must adapt slowly to the ever changing world. The church in Aruba has adapted in this way.